

AP Language and Composition – ON BEING

Norton Reader Discussion Series

Date:	Leaders:	Essay:
9/29	Ms. Gillette	"The Ugly Tourist," Jamaica Kincaid (642)
10/3		"How It Feels to be Colored Me," Zora Neale Hurston (30) "Black Men and Public Spaces," Brent Staples (420)
10/5		"On Being a Cripple," Nancy Mairs (33) "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self," Alice Walker (44)
10/11		"Shooting an Elephant," George Orwell (935) "Under the Influence," Scott Russell Sanders (160)
10/13		"On Being..." rough draft due

ALL STUDENTS: Consider the following questions:

Who is the writer and what is his/her purpose?

Who is the primary audience and how does the writer "close the gap"?

What is remarkable about choices made in the presentation of the material?

How does the form the essay takes assist in its function?

How does the author shape an understanding of what it means to BE _____ ?

Is the essay effective? Why? Why not?

Discussion Leaders: On your assigned date, come in prepared to lead a discussion on "your" essay. Reread it carefully, collect evidence (specific details/quotations) that illustrates and supports your insights about the rhetorical choices made in the piece, and compose open-ended questions to stimulate a discussion. Isolate at least one specific sentence or passage that demonstrates this writer's particular style. At the end of discussion, you and your partner will pass in a single analysis of the work, including the questions you created for discussion. (Google Docs can facilitate this work if you are unable to collaborate in person.)

Others: Come in with at least one written question and one comment to offer to the discussion based on your thoughtful reading (I will be checking/collecting sporadically). TAKE PART in the discussion.

On days when you are not presenting, begin composing ideas for the "On Being..." personal essay.

"On Being..."

When a person categorizes another as a "cripple" or "tourist" or "a black man" or "son of an alcoholic" et cetera, powerful implications accompany that definition. A culturally shared understanding of the category is assumed to be out there, a notion, not necessarily true, of what it means to be someone associated with that category. And yet this categorization is not the whole story; that belongs to the individual, not the group.

Your task: to write a personal essay exploring what it means to be _____.

Fill in the blank with a word or phrase you are willing to explore about your own personal identity. Gather information from your own knowledge and experience, then, develop a perspective on your subject so that you can write about it.

Identify an audience for your writing; consider the assumptions and beliefs, both obvious and subtle, this audience might have about the category of human identity you've identified yourself as part of.

Illustrate your definition with vignettes, anecdotes, and scenes that exemplify / fortify your notion about what being someone who is "X" involves. Use any of the Norton discussion series as models. Avoid generalizing.

A conference and serious revision is required.

"Soybeans"

by Thomas Alan Orr

The October air was warm and musky, blowing
Over brown fields, heavy with the fragrance
Of freshly combined beans, the breath of harvest.

He was pulling a truckload onto the scales
At the elevator near the rail siding north of town
When a big Cadillac drove up. A man stepped out,
Wearing a three-piece suit and a gold pinky ring.
The man said he had just invested a hundred grand
In soybeans and wanted to see what they looked like.

The farmer stared at the man and was quiet,
reaching
For the tobacco in the rear pocket of his jeans,
Where he wore his only ring, a threadbare circle
rubbed
By working cans of dip and long hours on the
backside
Of a hundred acre run. He scooped up a handful
Of small white beans, the pearls of the prairie,
saying:

Soybeans look like a foot of water on the field in
April
When you're ready to plant and can't get in;
Like three kids at the kitchen table
Eating macaroni and cheese five nights in a row,
Or like a broken part on the combine when
Your credit with the implement dealer is nearly
tapped.

Soybeans look like prayers bouncing off the ceiling
When prices on the Chicago grain market start to
drop;
Or like your old man's tears when you tell him
How much the land might bring for subdivisions.
Soybeans look like the first good night of sleep in
weeks
When you unload at the elevator and the kids get
Christmas.

He spat a little juice on the tire of the Cadillac,
Laughing despite himself and saying to the man:
Now maybe you can tell me what a hundred grand
looks like.

